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Captain BRITAIN

No. 1

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POSTERS

Welcome to *Captain Britain Monthly*, Number One. Britain's only active superhero has finally made it back to his own title, and we've finally got it to the bookstalls, both here and across the Atlantic. Launching the title in two continents simultaneously has meant that we've had to keep the good Captain's fans in the U.K. waiting a little while for his return. However, the wait is over, and we're now looking forward to a smooth production run that will last as long as you, our readers, wish it to.

There's a veritable Who's Who of British comic talent on view in this issue. Naturally, we hope you find favour with their work and with the magazine as a whole. There are two ways we'll get to know your views if you are unhappy with anything... you can write to us via the *Captain Britain Communications* page, or you can stop buying the title. We hope you'll make it the former, and that the Communications page, when it appears, will provide a forum for lively and entertaining debate. (Letters of encouragement will also be gratefully received!)

That's for future issues, however. Right now, it's Number One... the return of *Captain Britain*... a host of fascinating characters in support strips... and the end of this introduction!

Editor: Ian Rimmer • **Design:** John Tomlinson •
Production: Tim Hampson and Alison Gill •
Advertising: Sally Benson (01-221 1232)



Captain BRITAIN contents



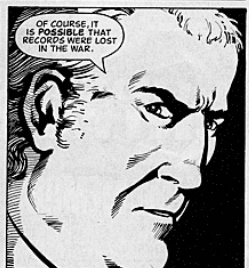
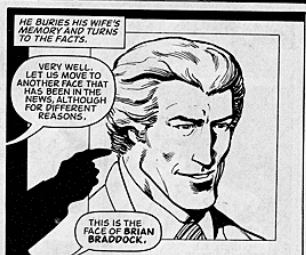
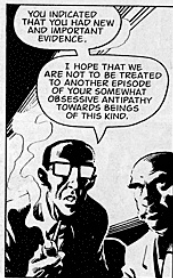
- CAPTAIN BRITAIN** – Reflections of a superhero in *Myth, Memory and Legend*..... P4
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Our Address: *Captain Britain Communications*,
23 Redan Place, Bayswater, London W2 4SA,
ENGLAND.











IT IS WARM
BY THE FIRE.

WHAT'S THIS,
BRIAN? NOT
WAITING TO SEE
YOURSELF ON
THE BOX AGAIN,
ARE YOU?

HELLO,
BETSY.

IT MUST BE
NICE TO BE SO
FAMOUS.

BRIAN
BRADPOCK, THE
YOUNG SQUIRE
RETURNED...



C'MON, YOU
KNOW THAT
THE ONLY
REASON I'VE
PUT MYSELF
IN THE PUB-
LIC EYE IS
TO SECURE
OUR COVER.

NOT
THROUGH
VANITY, I
ASSURE YOU.



WE COULD BOTH
DO WITH A BIT OF
RELAXATION. I'VE JUST
BEEN UP WITH MEGGAN-
I DON'T THINK SHE'S
USED TO BEING IN
SUCH A BIG
BUILDING YET.

DON'T GET ALL
UPTIGHT, I WAS
ONLY TEASING.

WHAT ABOUT
ALISON?
HOW'S SHE?

STILL SLEEP-
ING MOST OF THE
TIME, BUT I THINK
SHE'S IMPROVING.



IT'S GOOD TO
BE WITH YOU
AGAIN, BEE.

BEE?

WE USED TO
CALL EACH OTHER
THAT, DIDN'T WE,
WHEN WE WERE
KIDS.

IT SEEMS A
LONG TIME AGO
NOW, EVERYTHING
SEEMS SO LONG
AGO.

EVERYTHING
BEFORE....



... BEFORE I
LOST YOU FROM
MY MIND.

BEFORE
DARKMOOR!

IT WAS LONELY
WITHOUT YOU. I
DIDN'T KNOW WHAT
WAS HAPPENING
TO YOU. I WAS
SCARED...

I WAS
SCARED
TOO...

"I WENT TO DARKMOOR TO HELP
DR. TRAVIS IN THE SUMMER BREAK
TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY AFTER MUM
AND DAD DIED, AND TO GET SOME
EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD."

"IT DIDN'T SEEM AS IF I'D
BEEN THERE FOR TEN MIN-
UTES BEFORE THE CALM
ORDER OF SCIENTIFIC
RESEARCH WAS TRANS-
FORMED INTO SOMETHING
MORE LIKE A JAMES BOND
MOVIE..."



"I GOT EXPERIENCE
ALRIGHT, BUT NOT THE
KIND I EXPECTED."

"... ONLY THIS
WAS FOR REAL."



"I PANICKED.
I RAN."

"THE ATTACKERS CHASED
ME OUT ONTO THE MOOR.
I CRASHED. I THOUGHT
THAT IT WAS ALL OVER."

"BUT IT WAS ONLY
JUST BEGINNING."

"THEY MADE
ME CHOOSE."

"BUT
THERE WAS
NO CHOICE."

"THEY DIPPED ME
IN MAGIC AND
CLOTHED ME IN
SCIENCE."

"THEY MADE
ME A HERO."

"THEY DRAGGED ME
SCREAMING INTO
THE OMNIVERSE..."

"THEY
GAVE ME
A CAUSE."

"THEY NAMED ME."

"THEY MADE
ME FIGHT."

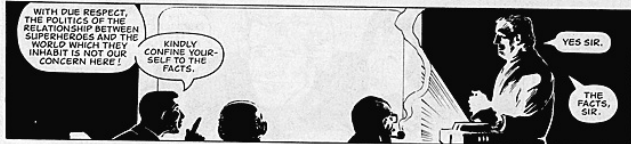
"I WAS THEIR
CREATION
BIRTHED IN
BLOOD."

"I WAS CAPTAIN BRITAIN."

"THEY MADE
ME FIGHT."

"AND I LIKED IT."





WITH DUE RESPECT, THE POLITICS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERHEROES AND THE WORLD WHICH THEY INHABIT IS NOT OUR CONCERN HERE!

KINDLY CONFINE YOURSELF TO THE FACTS.

YES SIR.

THE FACTS, SIR.



FACT! BRADDOCK RETURNS TO UNIVERSITY.

CAPTAIN BRITAIN IS ACTIVE IN THE U.K.

MY REPORT LISTS BRADDOCK FAMILY CONNECTIONS IN MANY CAPTAIN BRITAIN INCIDENTS, INCLUDING THE EVENTS WHICH CULMINATED IN THE BOMBING OF BRADDOCK MANOR BY S.T.R.I.K.E.



FACT! BRADDOCK VISITS AMERICA.

AT THE SAME TIME, CAPTAIN BRITAIN IS CONVERSING WITH SUPERHEROES IN THE U.S.



FACT! WHILST FLYING BACK FROM KENNEDY AIRPORT, BRADDOCK'S PLANE GETS INTO TROUBLE...

EYEWITNESS REPORTS TELL US THAT HE JUMPS FROM THE PLANE SCREAMING THAT HE IS UNDER PSYCHIC ATTACK!

Daily Mail

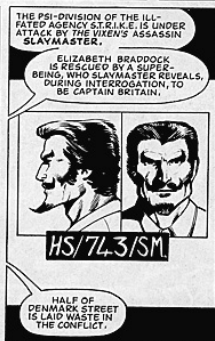
THREE SURVIVE AIRLINE DISASTER

FACT! BRADDOCK IS MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD, AND CAPTAIN BRITAIN IS NO LONGER A FEATURE OF BRITISH LIFE.



FACT! FOUR YEARS LATER, WHEN ELIZABETH BRADDOCK, NOW WORKING FOR S.T.R.I.K.E., IS IN DANGER...

CAPTAIN BRITAIN REAPPEARS. HE IS BIGGER, MORE POWERFUL AND MORE DANGEROUS.



THE PSI-DIVISION OF THE ILL-FATED AGENCY S.T.R.I.K.E. IS UNDER ATTACK BY THE VIXEN'S ASSASSIN SLAYMASTER.

ELIZABETH BRADDOCK IS RESCUED BY A SUPER-BEING, WHO SLAYMASTER REVEALS, DURING INTERROGATION, TO BE CAPTAIN BRITAIN.

HS/743/SM.

HALF OF DENMARK STREET IS LAID WASTE IN THE CONFLICT.



HARDLY SUR-PRISING THAT SIR JAMES JASPERS GOT SO MUCH SUPPORT IN HIS STAND AGAINST SUPERHEROES, IS IT?

WHO?

YOU
LIKED
IT?

HOW
COULD YOU
LIKE IT?

IT'S THE
THRILL, BETSY.
IT'S THE
ADVENTURE.

IT'S THE
POWER AND THE
GLORY SINGING
IN THE VEINS.

IN THOSE EARLY
DAYS I JUST USED TO
FIGHT AND WIN...

"MY MIND WAS
NOT FLEXIBLE
ENOUGH FOR THE CONCEPTS
INVOLVED. I THOUGHT WITH
MY FISTS."

"EVENTUALLY I
SOUGHT ESCAPE
FROM TORMENT
IN SELF-
DESTRUCTION..."

"THIS WAS MY BAPTISM
OF SOLITUDE."

"FOR TWO
YEARS I WAS
A HERMIT...
ALONE."

"I WAS
WAITING..."

"WAITING TO
BE SHOWN..."

"I DIVED FROM
THE PLANE INTO
THE OCEAN, BUT
I DID NOT DIE..."

"NOT THEN."

"...WAITING FOR
THE CONJURER
TO REVEAL HIS
TRICKS."

LATER,
AS I GREW MORE
ACCUSTOMED TO MY
POWER I BEGAN TO
QUESTION ITS
SOURCE. WAS IT
SCIENCE, OR
MAGIC?

"...BUT EVERY-
THING THAT WAS
HAPPENING TO ME
WAS SO STRANGE,
SO BIZARRE."

"THE BLACK
KNIGHT CAME
AND SHOWED
ME MYSTERIES
OF MAGIC."

"MERLIN NURTURED ME IN
OTHERWORLD. FOR A TIME
I WAS AT PEACE."

"WE FOUGHT WITH WRAITHS
AND SHADOWBEASTS AND
WALKED WITH ANCIENT
FEAR."

"HE HELPED ME INTO
OTHERWORLD, INTO THE
PRESENCE OF MERLIN,
INTO THE PRESENCE OF
INCARNATE LEGEND."

"BUT THEN I HAD TO
FIGHT AGAIN. TO SAVE
A WORLD GONE MAD."

"I WAS DECKED OUT IN NEW COLOURS
AND GIVEN AN ELFIN COMPANION TO
JOURNEY WITH ME TO EARTH. HIS
NAME WAS JACKDAW."

"BUT THIS WAS AN ALTERNATE
EARTH. THE EARTH OF CAPTAIN
U.K.-LINDA McQUILLAN'S EARTH."

"I MET
SATURNINE
THERE..."

"IT WAS AN EARTH OF
MIND-BENDING HORROR."

"...POOR
JACKDAW. THEY
KILLED HIM."

"THE TASTE OF
BLOOD WAS IN
THE AIR..."

"BEAUTIFUL,
RUTHLESS
SATURNINE."

"A TASTE OF THINGS
TO COME."

"AND I HAD TO
FIGHT THERE."

"I LOST.
I FAILED!"

"AGAINST THE
STATUS CREW."

"DEATH HUNTED ME
TO MY KNEES..."

"...IT TRAPPED ME
IN A GRAVEYARD."

"I WAS
AFRAID."

"MERLIN SAVED ME. HE
SNATCHED ME FROM
DEATH'S CRADLE."

"AGAINST THE MADNESS OF
THE JASPER'S WARP."

"I HAD TO FIGHT TO
SAVE THE WORLD."

"HE SENT ME
BACK TO YOU."

"HE GAVE ME A SECOND CHANCE."

"THIS TIME I DID NOT FAIL HIM. THIS TIME WE WON."

THAT IS RIGHT. ISN'T IT... THIS IS MY TIME? I AM HOME?

YES, BRIAN. THE PRICE WAS HIGH, BUT WE DID WIN.

WE KNOW WE WON.

WE HAVE TIME TO MOURN OUR DEAD.

"THEN WHO IS IT THAT KEEPS ATTACKING ME NOW? WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM?"

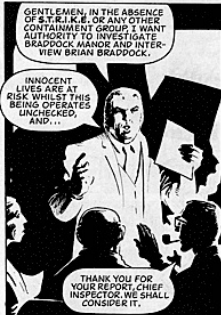
WHAT ABOUT THE VIXEN?

WHAT HAPPENED TO HER WHEN THE JASPER'S WARD COLLAPSED? OR MAYBE IT'S SATURNINE, OR MANDRAGON... OR THE SPECIAL EXECUTIVE...

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE. WE CANNOT AFFORD THE LUXURY OF REST...

NOT NOW.

PROBABLY NOT EVER.



The 26th Century.

Two great empires spread through space; one centred on Earth, the other on Skaro. Life is lived against a background of war... a stalemated war that neither side can win... though few humans have seen their foe, except those of a rare breed. Such a man is...

Abslom Daak DALEKOOO CCCCKILLER

Script: Steve Moore

Art: Steve Dillon



ABSLON DAAK...
YOU HAVE BEEN FOUND
GUILTY ON 25 CHARGES
OF MURDER, PILLAGE,
PIRACY, MASSACRE AND
OTHER CRIMES TOO
HORRIBLE TO BRING
TO THE PUBLIC
ATTENTION...

THERE ARE
ONLY TWO
CHOICES...
DEATH BY
VAPORISATION

...OR
EXILE
D-K!!

VAPORISATION
DOESN'T HURT
...I'LL TAKE
DEE-KAY!!



YOU KNOW
WHAT THIS
ENTAILS?

SURE!

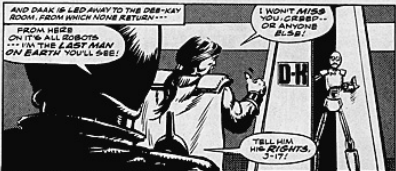
THEN MAY
YOUR GOD HAVE
MERCY ON YOUR
SOUL... TAKE
HIM AWAY!



DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE
A BRAVE MAN OR A FOOL,
DAAK-- BUT IT'S YOUR
CHOICE: COME ON!

NEXT
CASE?

GUETIS HENRY
FOOL-- ACCUSED
OF RATON THE
VEGAN
AMBASSADOR!



AND DAAK IS LED AWAY TO THE DEE-KAY
ROOM, FROM WHICH NONE RETURN...

FROM HERE
ON IT'S ALL ROBOTS
...I'M THE LAST MAN
ON EARTH YOU'LL SEE!

I WON'T MISS
YOU, CREED--
OR ANYONE
ELSE!

TELL HIM
HIS RIGHTS,
3-17!

AND AS THE HEAVY DOOR
SLAMS SHUT BEHIND THEM...
YOU HAVE CHOSEN EXILE
AS A DALEK-KILLER!



I KNOW
WHAT
DEE-KAY
MEANS!

YOU WILL BE
EXILED BY MATTER-
TRANSMITTER TO
A WORLD WITHIN THE
CAK-SK-SHEDGE... YOU
WILL BE FULLY-
ARMED...

IN FIGHTING
FOR YOUR LIFE,
YOU WILL ACT AS
A GUERRILLA FOR
THE EMPIRE...



KILL AS MANY
DALEKS AS YOU
CAN... BEFORE
THEY KILL YOU!

YOU HAVE ONE
LAST CHANCE TO
CHANGE YOUR
MIND...

FORGET IT
... I LIKE
KILLING...



WHAT'S MY
LIFE
EXPECTANCY?
A MONTH?
A WEEK?



2 HRS.
32 MINS.
23 SECS...

WOULDN'T HAVE
MUCH TIME TO
KILL THEN,
WELL I?



SO THAT'S THE
TRANSMITTER...
WHY DON'T YOU
JUST SEND A
WHOLE ARMY
THROUGH IT?

BECAUSE ONLY ONE
MAN IN FOUR ARRIVES
AT HIS DESTINATION ALIVE
... THE REST ARE SCRAMBLED
ALL OVER THE GALAXY!



WE CAN'T TELL
IF THEY'RE DEAD
OR NOT... BUT THEY'RE
CERTAINLY IN VERY
SMALL PIECES!

GREAT...
ARE THESE
THE
WEAPONS?



TAKE WHAT
YOU LIKE... BOMBS,
BLASTERS, LASERS...

BUT DON'T THINK
OF USING THEM TO
ESCAPE... THEY ONLY
BECOME ACTIVATED
AFTER GOING
THROUGH THE
TRANSMITTER!



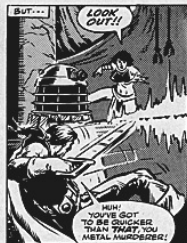
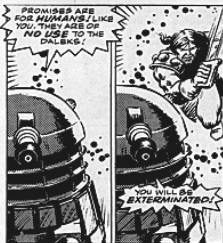
AND SO...

DO YOU HAVE
ANY LAST MESSAGE
FOR ANYONE?

YEAH... TELL
THE JUDGES...
I'LL BE
BACK!!

I DOUBT
THAT THE
ODDS AGAINST
SURVIVAL ARE
800 MILLION
TO ONE!!





Next: Massacre on MAZAM!



The Mysterious NIGHT-RAVEN

Script: Steve Parkhouse

Art: David Lloyd

NIGHT-TIME IN THE CITY, IN A DOWNTOWN HOTEL ROOM A HIGH LEVEL BUSINESS CONFERENCE APPROACHES STALEMATE...

BE FAIR, GRANACCI... WHY SHOULD WE GIVE UP OUR EAST SIDE OPERATIONS FOR A PUNK LIKE CAGNIOLE?

WE GOT PLANS FOR THE KID, HE'S DOIN' WELL... WE DON'T WANT HIM SQUEEZED BY YOUR GUYS OVER THERE...

YOU GOT ANY IDEA HOW LONG THOSE OPERATIONS TOOK TO SET UP? THREE YEARS... THREE HARD YEARS!

AND FOR WHAT? WHAT'S YOUR PAY-OFF? WE'RE OFFERING YOU A NEW SLICE OF TERRITORY AND AN INTEREST IN THE BREWERY... YOU CAN HARDLY REFUSE...

THESE DECISIONS CAN'T BE HURRIED, GRANACCI... BE REASONABLE. WHAT DO YOU THINK, DON CASTILLO... DO WE AMALGAMATE OR NOT?

FRANKLY... I THINK THE WHOLE IDEA'S RUBBISH!

WHAAT?

YOU... YOU'RE NOT DON CASTILLO!

QUICK... FINISH HIM!

BLAM!

UUNNNH!

DAT TABLE WON'T SAVE 'IM... THIS BABY'LL TEAR 'IM APART!





Next: **Blind Justice!**



Paragon of Painthorpe Street

by Steve Alan Illustrations by Jeff Anderson

'Time with a gift of tears'

A. C. Swinburne

It took Redmond Jonah Pringle forty-eight years, five months, two weeks and a day to come to the conclusion that

his life was an absolute mess. Even after this considerable lapse of time it was quite an oblique discovery, since Pringle had never been a man given to sudden decisions or impulsive action. This was one of the many reasons why his life was an absolute mess.

Pringle woke at his usual time of

twenty-five-past-seven, lay in for six minutes to prove he was no slave to the clock (as usual) then in a casual but unlovely movement rose, kraken-like, from the depths of his bed.

He stumped to the washbasin, peering with no discernible enthusiasm into the tasteless oval mirror above.



The wreckage of a quarter century at the Coalmouth Department of Health and Social Security met his crimson gaze. He prepared the time honoured litany "God, I feel rough." But something was different today. Something about the bags of dull flesh under his mottled, characterless eyes. Or perhaps the substantial triple chin, or those quite incredible furrows across his forehead, brutally obvious now that the night had pushed away what remained of his fading brown hair. White, slumped shoulders, sagging old man's tits. A tear welled, broke, rolled slowly down pallid, coarsened cheeks. "God," he said softly. "I am rough".

"My life is a mess," Pringle muttered at breakfast, as his landlady churned back and forth. "A terrible, wasted, utter mess," as she placed a huge bowl of still heaving porridge in front of him.

"Mrrrlxphmmff," said Eunice Cribble. Eunice Cribble was neither a particularly imaginative nor a particularly sympathetic woman. Pringle stared unseeingly after her voluminous form. Soon she reappeared from the hallway, and a parcel landed with practised ease, millimetres from the porridge.

Pringle knew what it contained. On any other day he would have attacked the wrapping with adolescent glee, but today he merely sat, chewing the living hell out of his lip. They were all there. Reef Radford, The Lightning Legion, Tarnaz the Untamed, and his favourite, his very favourite, Paragon.

The thought evoked his dream of the night before. It has been the storyline of Paragon 311: CATACLYSMO, THE LIVING CONDOMINIUM. Paragon's arch-enemy, Dexter Dorbolak, had constructed a colossal, skyscraping robot, which doubled as a strike-proof headquarters for four of the most fiendishly depraved scientific minds in the criminal hemisphere. Dork the Disruptor, Captain Complex, General DeKay, Repello. Dex Dorbolak, of course, sat in the cranium, broadcasting preposterous demands in a nasal Hungarian accent. Cataclysmo, he railed, demanded absolute world supremacy, and was prepared to be particularly anti-social in pursuit of that end.

At this point in the dream Pringle had appeared on the scene, shrugging off his grey, grey, fifteen year-old suit to reveal the lustrous red, white and blue uniform... Turning aerobic, pinwheeling stunts above the streets of Capitol City, which bore an inescapable resemblance to Coalmouth DHSS... Darting and diving to the open-mouthed multitudes, a St. Peter's square of adoring female onlookers. He was Paragon. Gladi-



diator, Paladin, Man of Tomorrow.

Paragon had scrambled Cataclysmo's air-conditioning system with his para-breath, warping and distorting the sound waves of Dorbolak's malefic manifesto. Instead, each of the four fiendishly depraved scientific geniuses began to hear a lurid and intricate catalogue of his mother's sexual short-comings; hardly the tonic for nerves already taut with incurable lunacy. Captain Complex in particular, who had never fully recovered from the fathomless horror of seeing his mother caught in a combine harvester on his sixth birthday, took extreme umbrage, and sellotaped a big grenade to Cataclysmo's central reactor. Cataclysmo hadn't been worth a hill of beans after that.

Paragon, meanwhile, even had time in hand to save Kora Kane, plummeting from the topmost tower of a nearby building, as she was wont to do in Paragon adventures. (Kora Kane had plummeted from the topmost tower of most buildings in Capitol

City, some several times over). Pringle had swooped to her aid, as Paragon was wont to do.

And then, something miraculous had occurred. Instead of Kora Kane, dauntless and impossibly beautiful T.V. anchor-woman, Pringle glanced down to find himself cradling lovely, dark-eyed brunette Joan Riley, a girl from his own office. "You needn't be afraid of me, I won't harm you," he felt himself say. Joan Riley responded by fainting dead away into his burgeoning, muscular embrace. "Oh Jonah," she cooed. "I never even suspected..."

"Buck up, ye great daft item!"

Pringle smiled mistily, as he took in Eunice Cribble's meaty fists, planted either side of her lumpy form. "I knew you weren't listening. I knew you weren't listening!"

"Um, well, it's not much that I wasn't listening," he began, "I mean, I heard what you were saying, it's just..." he let the words drivel pitifully, suddenly sickened by his weak,



tremulous voice, his northern accent. "Shuttlup! Shuttlup!" It appeared that Eunice Cribble's patience had been exhausted.

"Please, that is, please — continue, Mrs. Cribble." Eunice Cribble calmed herself with emphatic effort. "What I said, Mister Pringle, 'ad you deemed it necessary to listen, was that I think you've been wearing out my stair carpets again."

Oh God, Oh God, thought Pringle. "Well? Well?"

Pringle vacillated wretchedly between the fear of lying to her, and the terrible prospect of her wrath, should he tell the truth. Fastidiously house-proud, Eunice Cribble insisted that all her lodgers (Pringle) walked bow-legged up the stairs, to reduce wear and tear on the carpet. Instead it wore away at either side, and was eventually used to carpet the landing outside Pringle's room. It looked ridiculous.

"Ah, it may be that on the occasional, uh-occasion, that I didn't quite remember to..."

"I knew it! How many times have you been told? How many?"

"I really couldn't begin to..."

"Pathetic."

Having pronounced this terrible judgement Eunice Cribble stomped away towards the kitchen, her eyes raised sky high. Pringle stared at his porridge, wishing she wouldn't make it so thin.

He broke open the package on his train to work, leafing through the lurid four-colour contents until he reached *Paragon* 500. It was the anniversary issue, fifty pages lovingly rendered in oils by Carl Grebe, *Paragon* artist par excellence. Pringle smiled and smiled. **HOLOCAUST IN ATOM CITY.** Even the title had that indefinable ring of classic literature.

He read, as *Paragon* encountered Dex Dorbolak on Atom Isle, where the aberrant mastermind had deliberately sabotaged a nuclear reactor, saturating the island in a deadly hail of nuclear waste. In seconds the entire population of Atom Isle had been transformed into superheroes and supervillains, each with a different costume, power, and personal philosophy. Very shortly after that they had begun beating the tar out of each other.

Paragon was powerless to help, since he had been lured into a vat of molten Pedasol immediately upon arrival. Pedasol was entirely harmless to the vast majority of humanity, utilised as it was in the treatment of verrucas. *Paragon*, however, became immediately comatose in its proximity. As a plot device Pedasol was a

permanent fixture of the *Paragon* series, and had been the focus of many a dull storyline.

Pringle's train slowed as it ground into Coalmouth Central, and impatiently he thumbed through to the last page. Very much alive, *Paragon* waded ankle-deep in ticker-tape and floral tributes toward the Whitehouse. Less obviously alive, Pringle waded lip-deep in *weltschmerz* toward the funereal ranks of breeze block which formed the Coalmouth DHSS. His demeanour was dark indeed.

Drifting disconsolately along to key in at the clock, he studied the peeling brown paint, scuffed parqueted floor,

cheap metal coat hangers. So constantly, crushingly there! He remembered the first time, twenty-three years earlier. He had walked faster then. He had worn his thick and dark hair with a *Paragon* kiss-curl, had even affected spectacles, though his eyesight was perfectly adequate. Then he thought of the hopes and desires of that earnest twenty-five year old. How they had not been satisfied. How they never would be. It was a sobering thought, which seemed to call for some form of verbal recognition. "God, I'm fat," said Pringle.





He pushed open the office door and slithered to his desk. There was a great deal of work to do. Pringle sniffed, and wasted three minutes looking up 'entropy' in the Young Executives Deskbook.

Vile as he felt, however, Pringle experienced that same heady thrill as the time approached nine o'clock. Nine o'clock, when she arrived. Joan Riley had worked in Pringle's office for almost three years, and for around two years eleven months, he had been hopelessly in love with her. He, who had been twenty-eight before ever mustering enough confidence to ask a girl out. She had been grossly offended, and cried a lot. Her boyfriend had later found Pringle and hurled him against a wall, cutting the back of his neck. Pringle had come to the conclusion that he was not irresistible to women.

Ah, but Joan, Joan. She was only twenty-three, but until that morning Pringle had never noticed the age gap. He noticed her shining brown hair, her sparkling, somehow faraway eyes, the way the very air around her seemed to glow. She was just small enough to be shorter than he, and he loved her. However, it had taken Pringle some time to realise that her total indifference was not, in fact, coquettishness. He had resigned himself to loving her from afar.

Here she came – he could hear her footsteps, it could only be her. "And oh! She dances in such a way no sun upon an Easter Day is half so fine a sight". It was a fair rendition, but those who noticed only looked embarrassed. "Piss artist!" snapped a pimple-faced youth from an adjoining desk.

In walked Joan Riley, chatting animatedly with another girl. She sat, and rested her chin on her palm girlishly as she surveyed her own stack of work. Unnoticed, Pringle made cow eyes at her from his desk. Checking in the window that his Paragon kiss-curl was still combed carefully into place, he felt his heart thudding as he ransacked his imagination for a reason to speak to her. The other girl reappeared with two cups of coffee, placing one on Joan's desk. Adrenalin surged – there had been a memo! Nothing important, but it would do. Pringle took a deep, shuddering breath and strode across to her, as majestically as his corpulent build would allow. A wry smile creasing his face, he placed a fist either side of her desk top and leaned over. Her eyes said 'Oh really?'

"Morning, Miss Riley." Amusement crept into her expression. Miss Riley? "Seen the memo yet?" he ventured, intensifying the wry grin, but she was no longer looking at him. He followed



her eyes down, saw as she did his tie, soaking gently in her coffee. Joan Riley sniggered. The other girl giggled. In seconds the entire office was racked with raucous, braying laughter. Jonah Pringle went to the lavatory, locked himself in a cubicle, and cried for a very long time.

When he returned, something of a furore seemed to have erupted. Pringle sat at his desk observing the taut, worried faces, and trying to catch the almost conspiratorial conversation. Beever, a paperkeeper appeared, his face white and intense beneath a sparse beard, and Pringle flagged him down. Beever blinked rapidly behind his spectacles, a habit which lent the occasion some little drama.

"It's Powell, in the next block. Died at his desk, yesterday," Pringle assembled a vague image of a tall, stringy individual of much his own age, remarkable solely for his back, about which he talked a great deal. Powell, Dusty, dissipated, mummified in cigarette smoke. Dead.

"Apparently," said Beever, blinking with horrible enthusiasm, "apparently he lay over his desk all last night, and nobody noticed 'till the cleaners came round this morning. Must've thought he was asleep or something." Miffed that Pringle was no longer listening, Beever scurried away "My age," said Pringle quietly.

Beever reappeared barely five minutes later, and prodded Pringle's shoulder. Pringle focused. "You know Borewick wants to see you?" Pringle's mantle of suppressed fear returned. Ken Borewick was the Higher Executive Officer. "This afternoon," Beever continued. "Something about Powell, I think." He blinked significantly, and was gone.

Of course, thought Pringle, Borewick was fully capable of interviewing

him that same morning. However, as was his routine on Wednesdays, Borewick would retire to the executive washroom with a newspaper and a large packet of biscuits, lock himself in a cubicle, and would not emerge until lunchtime. Just long enough for a man to roast over the coals of Purgatory.

Afternoon approached and Pringle, damp and rubber-legged, knocked on the door of the office he had never, in twenty-three years, had occasion to visit. He wished the circumstances had been other than they were. He wished he was a thousand feet underground.

But Borewick was very noticeably smiling. Borewick did not do much of this. "Redmond!" He pumped Pringle's clammy hand. Pringle had not been called Redmond in thirty years.

"Sit yourself down!" He sat numbly opposite, as Borewick inserted tobacco stained thumbs into his lapels. He appraised the pale and trembling Pringle, smiling fatly.

"I'll be brief, Redmond. I think it's one of my better qualities." There was no time to reply. "As you know, a close personal friend of mine passed away yesterday." A momentary look of anguish created the impression of deep bereavement, violent internal conflict, and the loneliness of command. Pringle nodded wretchedly. "However!" The indomitable spark of true leadership. "I do have a replacement in mind. Are you following me, Redmond?"

"You –" Pringle swallowed "mean me?"

"I think you'll find the position eminently suitable," Borewick continued, well into his stride. "Spacious working surroundings, the proximity of the canteen, and an additional bonus of three pounds fifty per week. Indeed, I almost envy you, Redmond."

Pringle's mouth worked. Joan – he'd have to leave Joan –

"I assume you do have some feelings on the matter, Redmond?" Borewick was becoming impatient.

"I – uh – I don't suppose I could turn down the job, Ken? I mean..."

Borewick stared at him. "That would be highly inadvisable." He tapped his feet. "Will there be anything else?"

Pringle rose slowly and heavily to his feet. Something had to be done. Something significant. Something momentous. Something generations would sing of for millennia. Something – something a Paragon might do. Hardly believing his own recklessness, he left Ken Borewick's office without closing the door.

Next:

Pringle Takes the Plunge!

FREEFALL WARRIORS



COOL BREEZE

THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN BIO-ENGINEERING FROM THE LABORATORIES OF INTRA-VENUS INC. BUT UNKNOWN TO THE EXECUTIVES OF THAT COMPANY, AN EXTRA FACTOR HAD BEEN BUILT INTO THIS ANDROID'S GENETIC CODE - THE "SOUL" FACTOR!

BIG CAT

THE FREE-FALL WARRIORS' MAXIMUM LEADER. ORIGINALLY A MERCENARY FLIER, LEADER OF THE HELLCATS FLIGHT - HE'S CAPRICIOUS, VICIOUS AND VINDICTIVE - ONE QUALITY SETS HIM APART FROM HIS HUMAN COUNTERPARTS... HE CAN SEE IN THE DARK!



MACHINE HEAD

ORIGINALLY HUMAN, MASSIVE IMPLANTS TRANSFORMED THIS OPERATIONAL HIGH FLIER INTO ONE OF THE MOST DEVASTATING WEAPONS IN THE INTRA-VENUS ARMOURY - A DIVE FIGHTER OF WARWORLD!



BRUCE

PRODUCT OF THE SURGEON-SCULPTORS OF RUBICON, THIS SHARK-FACED WEIRDO STARTED LIFE AS A "SUB-SPACER" CRUISING THE LOWER STRATAS OF SUB-SPACE AND POUNCING ON VICTIMS AS THEY PASSED. IN SHORT, A PIRATE. ONCE WRECKED ON THE PLANET MAHMOUD AND RAISED TO DEITY STATUS BY STUNNED ABORIGINES, HE HAD BESTOWED UPON HIM THE GIFT (OR CURSE) OF INVULNERABILITY IN BATTLE. SEEMS TO HAVE HELD GOOD SO FAR.



WARWORLD

The origin of THE FREE-FALL WARRIORS...

IT WAS HOT DOWN ON THE JUNGLE PLANET. A GREEN, REEKING HEAT. SOUR WITH THE SMELL OF SWEAT AND FEAR...

BENEATH THE BLOOD-WARM, SLUG-BROWN RIVER, THINGS SQUIRMED. DEATH WATCHED, PAINTING, FROM THE SHADOW-DAPPLED TREES...

THICK, FAT FLIES SWARMED IN A CLOUD AROUND A SHATTERED METAL TOMB, HALF-DROWNED IN THE GREAT SLIMY OOZE.

STAY BACK!

NIEN!
C'EQUA!



"THESE SHIPS USUALLY
CARRY A DOUBLE CREW.
SOMETIMES HUMAN ...
SOMETIMES ANDROID ..."

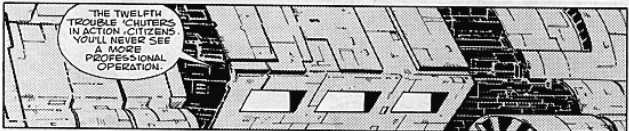
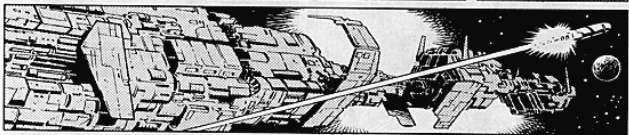
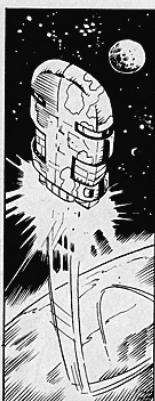
"AND SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T
TELL WHAT THE HELL THEY
ARE!"

HEY, SARGE!
SOMETHING
BIG COMIN'
OVER!

"WELCOME TO WARWORLD. CITIZENS.
I TRUST YOUR VISIT WILL BE BOTH
INTERESTING AND PROFITABLE."

"FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS
WE WANT YOU TO RELAX AND
OBSERVE SOME OF THE FINEST
HIGH-PERFORMANCE TECH-
NOLOGY AVAILABLE."

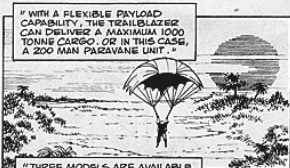
"FROM THE GREAT DRONE BOMBERS
TO THE HUMBLEST HAND-WEAPON,
INTRA-VENUS INC. OFFER THE
WIDEST RANGE OF PRODUCTS ON
THE MARKET TODAY."



DESIGNED AS A MEDIUM-RANGE SHUTTLE, IT CAN OPERATE FROM A MOTHER-SHIP, ORBITTING PLATFORM OR SPACE-STATION.



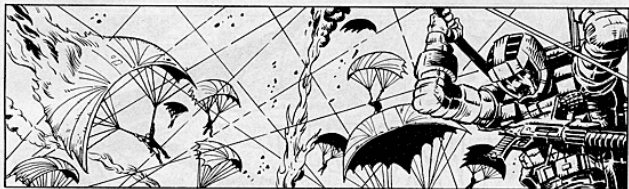
"WITH A FLEXIBLE PAYLOAD CAPABILITY, THE TRAILBLAZER CAN DELIVER A MAXIMUM 1000 TONNE CARGO. OR IN THIS CASE, A 200 MAN PARAVANE UNIT."



"THREE MODELS ARE AVAILABLE. TERMS NEGOTIABLE THROUGH THE USUAL CHANNELS."



IT'S AN AMBUSH!
CROSSFIRE FROM NORTH
SECTOR! GO
LEFT!
GO LEFT!





SCHEDULED TO
RENDZVOUS WITH
THE AIRBORNE UNIT
AT EXACTLY 1300
HOURS, THE AIR
COVER MAY
SURPRISE YOU...

VRAAAM!

THE LEGENDARY
HELLCATS!

A MERCENARY
FORCE OF THREE
CRAFT, FLYING HIGHLY
MODIFIED AND
PERSONALISED
TIGERFIRES,
UNFORTUNATELY NOT
FOR SALE, THESE
THREE IN-SPACE
FLIEES MUST BE
KNOWN THROUGH-
OUT THE
GALAXY.

THE HELLCATS?
YOU MIGHT HAVE
WARNED US...

IS THIS GOING
TO BE SAFE?

SAFE?

NOBODY IS
SAFE ON WAR-
WORLD, COMMODORE.
BUT THEN...

WE'RE NOT
ON WARWORLD,
ARE WE?

THE COMMODORE
HAS A POINT. THE HELL-
CATS ARE NOTORIOUS.
THEY'VE BEEN KNOWN
TO MAKE UP THEIR OWN
RULES AS THEY GO
ALONG!

THAT'S TRUE,
AMBASSADOR.
BUT THE SITUATION
IS WELL IN HAND.

THE HELLCATS
HAVE BEEN
PROVIDED WITH
SOME STIFF
OPPOSITION.

VERY
STIFF
INDEED.

THE HELLCATS - A TRIO OF FELINE HOMINIDS FROM THE PLANET ALTARIA, THEY CARRIED A SINGLE BRIEF FOR EVERY MISSION...

LOCATE: ENGAGE: DESTROY.

MAINTAIN PRESENT
COURSE AND SPEED
FOR APPROXIMATELY...
AH... THREE MINUTES.
LET'S HAVE A NICE,
TIGHT APPROACH
RUN, FELLAS. STRAIGHT
IN AND STRAIGHT OUT...

TWENTY MILES
TO TARGET AREA.
NO RESISTANCE
EXPEC...

WHAT
THE
HELL?!!

WHOMM!

Next: EVEN HELLCATS GET THE BLUES!

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Analogue:
Quartz Japanese
movement
Metal colour case
Stainless steel back
Sweep second hand
12 month guarantee
Leather strap

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GOT TIME ON YOUR
HANDS?

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